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JANNETTE CARRINGER FIORE

WILLIAM W. HOLDEN AND THE STANDARD--
THE CIVIL WAR YEARS

by

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One of the most controversial Civil War political figures in North Carolina was William W. Holden, editor of the powerful Raleigh, North Carolina Standard, member consecutively of four political parties, and reconstruction governor of North Carolina. Holden has been generally regarded as a politically ambitious and unscrupulous man, as well as something of a traitor for his role as advocate of peace during the Civil War.

Holden, trained in newspaper work from boyhood, left the Whig party in 1843 to accept the editorship of the Standard, the Democratic party organ in Raleigh. He rapidly built it into the largest paper in the state and became a leader in the Democratic party, and one of its more liberal voices. Originally a defender of the right of secession, his liberal position on other matters and his humble origins had led by 1860 to his alienation from the leadership of his party, and from the slaveholding interest in North Carolina.

During the Democratic National Convention of 1860 at Charleston and Baltimore and through the secession crisis which followed, Holden worked for the maintenance of the Union. With the firing on Fort Sumter and Lincoln's call for troops, he joined his state in secession, but rapidly became disillusioned with the Confederate cause, and devoted his efforts to securing peace. From the first months of the war onward, the pages of the Standard were filled with accusations of partisanship in both state and Confederate Governments, particularly in the exclusion of former

Union men from power, charges that the war was a "rich man's war and a poor man's fight", complaints that North Carolina was being unfairly treated by the Confederacy, and warnings that the Confederate government was infringing the rights of both states and individuals.

Holden's position found considerable support in North Carolina, as evidenced by his growing subscription list, and led to efforts both official and unofficial, to suppress the paper. He maintained his position throughout the war, however, with only occasional modifications, and at the end of the conflict was appointed reconstruction governor by President Johnson.

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INTRODUCTION

One of the most controversial figures of the Civil War period in North Carolina was William Woods Holden, editor for a quarter of a century of the (Raleigh) North Carolina Standard, member, at one time or another, of four political parties and a leader in three, and the only governor of the state ever to be impeached.

As an editor, Holden had few equals. It was generally acknowledged that the Standard, from the standpoint of craftsmanship, was the finest paper in the state, and it was equaled in influence, if at all, only by E. J. Hale's Fayetteville Observer. Holden possessed the ability, both valuable and dangerous in an editor, to seem to be always in the right. His command of language was remarkable. He was capable of passages of great strength, and equally capable of descending to the maudlin or absurd if the situation demanded. He always professed to be guided by the will of the people, and thus was able to effect changes of position without the slightest appearance of inconsistency. In times of extraordinary confusion, this served him well. In the secession crisis in 1860-61, for example, he could swing with the popular will from an anti-secession to a pro-secession position, retaining the loyalty of most of his subscribers throughout. He was, as his contemporary, Cornelia Phillips Spencer, observed, a man "who thoroughly understood his business, and who always kept his powder dry."¹

¹The Last Ninety Days of the War in North Carolina (New York: Watchman Publishing Company, 1866), pp. 246-247.

Holden was equally able as a political leader. A member consecutively of the Whig, Democratic, Conservative, and Republican parties, he played a major role in bringing the last three into power in North Carolina, and was regarded as a man who could "kill and make alive" in North Carolina politics.²

Holden's rather frequent changes of party, and his adoption of controversial positions, particularly during the Civil War, have led to a general tendency among historians of the period to discount him as an unscrupulous and self-seeking demagogue.³ Two periods in his career, in particular, have contributed to this impression--his activities during the Civil War as the leader of the anti-Confederate peace movement, and his role as post-war Republican governor of the state. Holden's actions in the first case have thus far been treated in very general terms. His enemies hold him responsible in large measure for the ever-increasing despondency and disaffection with the Southern cause which marked North Carolina's relations with the Confederacy. Less hostile students generally concede that his position to a great extent reflected rather than created public opinion in the state. What neither group has done thus far is to document in any detail what, precisely, Holden was doing. It is the purpose of this study to do this--to examine the kinds of material appearing in the Standard during the secession crisis and the war, and to trace the development of the various themes which, whatever their intent, appear to have reflected fairly accurately the sentiment of much of the population of North Carolina during the Civil War.

²J. G. de Roulhac Hamilton, Reconstruction in North Carolina (New York: Columbia University Press, 1914), p. 6.

³See for example the work by Hamilton cited above and his "William Woods Holden", Dictionary of American Biography, IX (New York: Scribner's, 1928-1937.), 138-140.

CHAPTER I

EDITOR HOLDEN

William Woods Holden was born in 1818 near Hillsboro, North Carolina, the illegitimate son of gristmill owner Thomas Holden and Priscilla Woods. His father later married Sally Nichols and took his son to live with him. Of formal education young Holden had almost none, being apprenticed at the age of ten to Dennis Heartt, editor of the Hillsboro Recorder, a Whig publication.⁴ He worked briefly for two other newspapers--one in Milton, North Carolina, and the other in Danville, Virginia--and in 1837 gained employment as a typesetter for the Raleigh Star, one of the two Whig organs in the capital. He remained with the Star four years, becoming associate editor of the paper.⁵ During these years he studied law, receiving his license to practice in the county courts in 1841.⁶ In the same year he married Anne Young of Raleigh, a niece of the founder of Peace Institute, a well-known preparatory school for women. This match to some extent offset his own lack of social standing, as Miss Young had some measure of both wealth and position.⁷

⁴Horace W. Raper, "William Woods Holden: A Political Biography" (Unpublished Ph. D. dissertation, Department of History, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill), p. 2.

⁵William K. Boyd, "William W. Holden," Historical Papers of the Trinity College Historical Society, Ser. III (Durham: The Seeman Printery, 1899), p. 43.

⁶Raper, p. 6. ⁷Boyd, p. 45.

Perhaps as a result of his chance association with Whig newspapers, Holden was, during these years, active in Whig politics in the state. In 1843, however, the Democratic party leadership, faced with Whig ascendancy in North Carolina and lacking a strong party editor, offered Holden the editorship of the North Carolina Standard, which he accepted. Borrowing the money for the purchase, he became the owner of the paper as well.⁸ He thus abandoned the Whigs and became the official voice of the Democratic party. It has generally been charged that he changed his political association for personal gain, but this seems an insufficient explanation, as the fortunes of both paper and party left much to be desired. Holden himself, in his first editorial, affirmed that he had been for some time in sympathy with the Democrats, as they had "always approved themselves the friends and supporters of equal rights, because they have ever been, and are now, the advocates of the many against the few; because [they] guard with peculiar vigilance the freedom, sovereignty, and independence of the respective states."⁹

This statement is in harmony with Holden's position, throughout his career, as the advocate of the interests of the common man, but there probably were other considerations as well. He had, by this time, come under the influence of John C. Calhoun,¹⁰ and it may well be, also, that he felt that the inconvenient circumstance of his birth, which was to embarrass him politically on more than one occasion, precluded his ever achieving genuine prominence in the Whig party. Whatever his motives,

⁸Clarence C. Norton, The Democratic Party in Ante-Bellum North Carolina (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1930), p. 18.

⁹North Carolina Standard, June 7, 1843.

¹⁰Boyd, pp. 47, 58.

both Holden and the Democratic Party were to profit from his choice.

When he assumed editorship of the Standard in 1843, the Democratic party in North Carolina, Holden later declared, numbered no more than eight thousand, and "in a social sense...were regarded as no more than the scalawags...", while "the Whigs were mainly in the towns and villages, and it was claimed that they possessed a large portion of all the 'intelligence and all the decency'."¹¹ The Democratic record on matters such as public education and publicly financed internal improvements, both favored by the Whigs, was negative, and the party had suffered frequent defeats since 1835.¹² The Standard, as was to be expected, was experiencing similar misfortunes, with a subscription list of about eight hundred--much of it unpaid--and a negligible amount of advertising.

With marked editorial ability, Holden rapidly brought the Standard to a position of influence in the state, and became himself a leader in the Democratic party.

At the end of...six months [after assuming the editorship]...I perceived a sudden and great quickening in my subscription. I realized the fact that the Democratic party trusted me thoroughly and fully.¹³

In the election of 1844, Holden campaigned vigorously for the election of James K. Polk, emphasizing the Texas annexation issue, which he correctly judged to be the strongest aspect of the platform.¹⁴ His major contribution to the campaign was the publication of a secret cir-

¹¹William W. Holden, Memoirs (Durham: The Seeman Printery, 1911), pp. 96-97.

¹²Norton, p. 69.

¹³Holden, p. 97.

¹⁴Raper, p. 14.

cular from Whig party headquarters. The circular appears to have been fairly routine, denouncing the Democratic party and platform as disunionist, and urging Whigs to get out the vote and to watch the polls against Democratic frauds. Its language was somewhat intemperate, however, and in the hands of Holden and the Democratic press, it became an effective campaign weapon.¹⁵

The Democrats failed to carry North Carolina in 1844 by about 3,500 votes, but as this was a smaller margin of defeat than that of the 1840 election, the party leadership was encouraged. The gubernatorial election that year was lost to the Whigs by a smaller margin of approximately 3,000 votes, and the 1845 congressional elections brought even more gratifying results, as the Democrats won six of the nine districts.¹⁶ After a severe set-back in 1846, when Governor Graham was re-elected by a majority of 7,000 votes,¹⁷ the party continued to make gains over the next several years, with Holden apparently partly responsible for a more popular approach to campaigning. In 1845, he himself successfully ran for a seat in the North Carolina House of Representatives.¹⁸

In 1848, Holden was instrumental in securing the gubernatorial nomination of David Settle Reid, on a free-suffrage platform.¹⁹ The issue of free suffrage, introduced by Reid in his opening campaign speech at New Bern, and opposed by the Whig candidate, Charles Manly,

¹⁵Boyd, pp. 47-48.

¹⁶Norton, pp. 142-148.

¹⁷Boyd, p. 51.

¹⁸Raper, p. 15.

¹⁹Ibid., pp. 17-18. In this case, "free-suffrage" referred to the abolition of property qualifications in voting for state senators.

was, Holden later declared, the issue which "sealed the fate of the Whig party in North Carolina...."²⁰ Actually the decline in Whig strength in North Carolina had broader causes. The party had been in trouble since 1844, when Whig objections to the annexation of Texas had alienated many North Carolinians. Opposition to the Mexican War, and the internal divisions of the national party over the slavery question and particularly over the Wilmot Proviso increased the difficulties of the Whigs in North Carolina, and provided the Democrats with ample opportunity for progress.

Reid lost the election in 1848 by 894 votes, but ran again in 1850 on the same platform, which now incorporated a call for the popular election of judges. He won this time by a margin of almost 3,000 votes.²¹ The Democratic victory in 1850 ended Whig control of North Carolina, and brought to Holden recognition as a leader in the party. He was rewarded for his services with the position of state printer, a job which he held from 1850 to 1860, clearing approximately eight thousand dollars yearly from this source.²²

In addition to his support of free suffrage, Holden favored many causes of a popular, and for the times, liberal, nature. He worked for an improved public school system, despite previous Democratic opposition, introducing the issue into the 1848 elections, and advocating several reforms such as an increased number of normal schools and the establishment of state-wide teacher institutes. During his term in the State House of Representatives, he sponsored a successful measure providing for construction in Raleigh of facilities for the deaf and dumb. He later served as a commissioner both of the Deaf and Dumb Institution and of the State

²⁰Holden, pp. 5-6. ²¹Raper, pp. 18-20.

²²Holden, p. 98.

Asylum for the Insane. In a similiar vein, but unsuccessfully, he urged the establishment of a state penitentiary system for the reform rather than the punishment of criminals.²³

Holden also supported government-financed internal improvements, especially railroads, again reversing the former position of the Democratic party.²⁴ His position on this issue and on the questions of free suffrage and public education doubtless accounted for much of his popularity in the western part of the state, where all of these issues were popular.

While Holden apparently was himself a slave-holder,²⁵ and before 1860 was "sound" on the slavery question, he appears to have looked forward to an industrial economy in North Carolina.

The South must also look more and more to the development of her resources, and to building up seaports and markets within her limits. To this end, systems of internal improvements should be pushed forward, and agriculture, mining, manufacture, and the arts generally promoted and encouraged.²⁶

Throughout his career he declared himself the friend of the artisan or mechanic class. In a remarkable editorial of October 1, 1845, he upheld the dignity of common labor, as he did frequently:

²³Raper, p. 18-20. A state penitentiary system was established by the Reconstruction constitution of 1868, and construction began during Holden's term as governor of North Carolina.

²⁴Ibid., p. 20.

²⁵There is some disagreement on this matter. Henry M. Wagstaff, in his State Rights and Political Parties in North Carolina (Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins Press, 1906), p. 127, states that Holden was never a slave-holder, but Raper (p. 29) cites an article from the Raleigh Times, reprinted in the Standard of March 27, 1850, which lists Holden as the owner of 190 slaves. In addition, the Standard itself, June 4, 1862, carried an advertisement for a runaway slave belonging to the editor, so it seems likely that Holden, perhaps through his wife's family, did own some slaves, though probably not as many as 190.

When will the days of sentimentality be over in North Carolina? When will those of our young men who are now fashionable idlers, cease to be so, and turn their hands either to farming or to some useful branch of the mechanics?... Here, as in many other portions of the country, the professions are crowded. Shall we crowd them still more, and thus encourage quackery and pettifogging, while our lands are neglected and our workshops silent? Let the truth be taught to our children as a house-hold work, that labor is honorable--labor of the hands, as well as of the head....

Labor must ultimately take the place of idleness, and the refinements and elegancies of life will then be left to take care of themselves. The radicalism of labor, which makes men of all the masses, is coming on apace. Capital is now the strong arm, as labor will be then.²⁷

In later years, as Holden drifted away from the aristocratic wing of the Democratic party, he associated himself more and more with the interests of the laboring class. He was active in forming the Raleigh Workingmen's Association in 1858, and frequently participated in its activities.²⁸

Despite his increasing association with the "common man" interest in his party, Holden, in the years before 1860, upheld the Southern position on the two-headed question of slavery and secession. He defended secession as "an original, pre-existing, reserved sovereign right," and declared that "whenever the Constitution is palpably violated by Congress or whenever that body fails to carry out the plain provisions of that instrument when required to protect Southern rights, the Union is dissolved...."²⁹

His position, however, seems to have varied somewhat with the

²⁷Standard, quoted in Raper, pp. 20-21.

²⁸William K. Boyd, "Ad Valorem Slave Taxation, 1858-1860," Historical Papers of the Trinity College Historical Society, Ser. V (Durham: The Seeman Printery, 1905), pp. 34-35.

²⁹Standard, January 15, 1851, quoted in Joseph Carlyle Sitterson, The Secession Movement in North Carolina (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1939), p. 91.

political current in the state. The Standard was among several North Carolina newspapers favoring the Southern Rights Convention at Nashville in 1850, but when public opinion in favor of the meeting failed to materialize, Holden dropped his support for it, regarding it as a dead issue.³⁰ Again in 1851, when the fall congressional elections showed a popular preference for "union" men, the Standard, while not denying the right of secession "in the last resort", declared that the exercise of that right was "quite another thing".³¹ In 1856, with the candidacy of Frémont, Holden became more emphatic in his defense of "Southern Rights", holding that the election of a "Black Republican" president would be sufficient grounds for disunion.³² Thus he maintained the right of secession throughout the period, but varied on the advisability of exercising that right at a given time.

With the gubernatorial election of 1858, Holden's political career reached a crisis. Having contributed much to the party's return to dominance in North Carolina, he sought for himself the Democratic nomination for governor that year. He was opposed by John W. Ellis of Salisbury, and out of this struggle arose a party split which was to place Holden in opposition to much of the leadership of the party. The convention, meeting at Charlotte in April, was controlled by the Ellis forces. Thus a rule was adopted to give each county a vote equivalent to its Democratic vote in 1856. As the eastern counties had cast a heavier vote in that election, this measure worked to the advantage of Ellis, who was a more acceptable candidate to the Eastern slave-holders, while the bulk of

³⁰Raper, p. 30.

³¹Standard, October 1, 15, 1851, quoted in Sitterson, p. 93.

³²Ibid., September 17, 24; October 25, 1856, quoted in Sitterson, p. 135.

Holden's support lay in the West. The Holden forces, seeing themselves outnumbered, and hoping to create a deadlock which might ultimately result in the nomination of their candidate, proposed to make the nomination dependent on a two-thirds majority. This measure was defeated in favor of a simple majority requirement.³³ The nomination went to Ellis, 25,951 to 21,594, with the votes of three eastern and twenty-seven western counties going to Holden.³⁴

It has generally been assumed that Holden was defeated because of his anti-aristocratic position and his association with the more equalitarian portion of the party.³⁵ The large number of former Whigs who had by then gravitated into the party may also have affected his chances, as he had been a major factor in their fall from power in the state. Holden himself felt that he had been unfairly dealt with, but continued to support the party, campaigning actively for Ellis. Despite this effort on his part, he was again passed over by his party when he attempted to gain a seat in the United States Senate in 1858,³⁶ and by the following year, reporters from the Standard were being excluded from Democratic party meetings in Raleigh.³⁷

During these years Holden apparently reappraised the political

³³Norton, pp. 230-231.

³⁴Standard, April 21, 1858.

³⁵Boyd ("W. W. Holden", p. 56), Norton (p. 231), Raper (p. 43), and Wagstaff (p. 101), all assume that this was a major factor. Holden's political opposition at the time also adhered to this view. The (Whig) Raleigh Register, April 14, 1868, quoted in Raper, p. 42, observed that "the lawyers and upper crust generally are for Ellis, while the unwashed multitudes are for Holden."

³⁶Wagstaff, p. 103.

³⁷Boyd, "W. W. Holden," p. 57.

climate in the state, as well as his situation in the Democratic party, and moved toward a new position. It was evident that he did not enjoy the favor of much of the leadership of his party. It was becoming equally evident that that leadership did not enjoy the favor of the majority of North Carolinians, to whom the interests of the slave-holding minority were not vital. While Holden did not break openly with the Democratic leaders until 1861, and although he continued to support Democratic candidates, he became associated more and more with the non-slaveholding wing of the party. He moved away from his militant position on "Southern Rights" and secession, and when the issue of ad valorem taxation of slaves was raised in 1858 by Moses A. Bledsoe of Wake County, it received his support. As the tax on slaves in North Carolina consisted of a simple head tax of forty cents, while the tax on land and other property was considerably higher, small landowners and artisans felt that they were discriminated against. Although Holden did not publicly support the ad valorem scheme until 1860, he favored and encouraged it in 1858, and one campaign sheet, the Adder, was published from his office by his former associate editor, Frank I. Wilson.³⁸ By the critical year 1860, Holden had abandoned his defense of the slaveholding interest and had adopted a strongly pro-union position. Having publicly upheld the right of secession for almost two decades, he now became North Carolina's most vocal opponent of the exercise of that right.

³⁸Boyd, "Ad Valorem Slave Taxation...", p. 35.

CHAPTER II

SECESSION--1860-1861

Holden was a delegate to the Democratic National Convention which met at Charleston and Baltimore in April and June, 1860. Of his political position at that time he noted in his Memoirs:

I was jealous for the so-called rights of the South on the question of slavery, and greatly concerned at the apparently impending election of a sectional candidate for the Presidency.

But I was not a Secessionist nor a Revolutionist. I was strongly attached to the union of the states, and felt myself to be a national man.³⁹

The convention met at Charleston in an atmosphere of crisis, with the delegates from the deep South determined to secure a platform embodying their demands, and with a bloc of northern Democrats committed to Douglas strong enough to prevent any action which their candidate opposed.⁴⁰ After serious disagreements over matters of organization, the sections collided on the fourth day on the adoption of a platform. Three reports were presented by the platform committee. The majority report, embodying the demands of the Southern extremists, denied the power of Congress or

³⁹Holden, p. 10.

⁴⁰Dwight L. Dumond, The Secession Movement, 1860-1861 (New York: Macmillan, 1931) pp. 35-37. Of the delegates committed to Douglas, one-hundred twenty, more than one third of the total convention, came from states in which the popular vote of Lincoln was to exceed that of all other candidates combined. This fact led to considerable resentment among Southerners, who felt that this group, which could not hope to elect the President, should not control the nomination.

of territorial legislatures to exclude slavery from the territories, and demanded Congressional protection of Southern "property" in the territories. Over the opposition of the Southern delegates, including those from North Carolina, this platform was rejected in favor of the first minority report, which retained the Cincinnati Platform of 1856, adhering to the doctrine of popular sovereignty. A second resolution, promising to abide by the decisions of the Supreme Court in cases involving slavery in the territories, was defeated by the Douglas bloc. With the adoption of the minority report, the delegations from Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Florida, and Texas left the convention, along with the majority of the delegates from South Carolina, Arkansas, and Georgia.⁴¹ During the bolt, Holden spoke in opposition to such action.

I spoke for ten minutes. I told the convention that I had been sent there by the state of North-Carolina, one of the four delegates at large; that I could not be a party to any steps looking to dis-union; that my party had sent me to maintain and preserve, and not destroy, the bonds of the union; that by an immense majority the people of my state... "would frown indignantly on the first dawning of every attempt to alienate any portion of our Country from the rest, or to enfeeble the sacred ties which link together the various parts."⁴²

The North Carolina delegation refused to join the bolt, as did the representatives of the other border states.

The remainder of the convention, failing after fifty-seven ballots to choose a presidential nominee, adjourned to meet at Baltimore on June 18, 1860.

Holden, in his defense of the Union at Charleston, apparently

⁴¹Ibid., pp. 50-54. In addition, two of the delegates from Delaware left the convention.

⁴²Holden, pp. 13-14.

guaged correctly the sentiment of North Carolina Democrats at the time, as the action of the delegation in refusing to leave the convention seems to have been generally approved in the state, both in the party press and in county meetings. The moderate attitude of the state was reflected also in a growth in support for Douglas after the Charleston convention.⁴³

The first question to be considered by the reconvened convention at Baltimore was the status of those delegates who had bolted at Charleston. With the adoption of the majority report on this issue, which held that the seats of the seceding delegates were vacant unless refilled by a second action of their constituents, and which, in the case of some states, seated delegates objectionable to the Southern members of the convention; majorities of the delegations of Virginia, North Carolina, Tennessee, and Kentucky left the convention. The remaining delegates then nominated Douglas.⁴⁴ Of the three North Carolina delegates refusing to join this second walkout, J. W. B. Watson and Holden abstained from voting, while R. P. Dick cast his vote for Douglas.⁴⁵

The representatives of the seventeen wholly or partially disaffected states met at Baltimore on June 23, nominating John C. Breckenridge of Kentucky and Joseph Lane of Oregon, and adopting the pro-Southern majority

⁴³Sitterson, p. 165-167.

⁴⁴Dumond, pp. 82-91. There remained in the convention thirteen full state delegations and partial delegations of seven states. The delegates of Oregon, California, and Massachusetts had also left--the first two to protest the refusal of the Douglas forces to permit a compromise which might save the party, and the last to protest the seating of R. L. Chaffee in the place of the regularly chosen Massachusetts delegate, B. F. Hallett, for whom Chaffee had substituted at Charleston.

⁴⁵Sitterson, p. 167.

platform report from the Charleston Convention.⁴⁶

The outcome of the Baltimore convention left the Democratic party in North Carolina badly divided, although the majority evidently preferred the Breckenridge ticket.⁴⁷ Holden himself favored Douglas, taking the position that he was properly nominated, and was more likely to defeat Lincoln,⁴⁸ but as it became apparent that Breckenridge was the stronger candidate in North Carolina, he agreed to support him, suggesting however that the electors be directed to vote for whichever candidate appeared more likely to win.⁴⁹

Toward the end of the campaign, as it became increasingly apparent that Lincoln would be elected, mounting concern over the proper course for North Carolina to follow was expressed in the state. The majority of the people apparently felt that the mere election of Lincoln would not be sufficient cause for secession, but many feared that the secession of at least the deep South might be the result.⁵⁰ Holden shared this apprehension and urged continually that Lincoln's election would not be cause for disunion. At the same time he declared himself opposed to any attempt of the Federal Government to coerce such states as might secede.⁵¹

On the day following the election, with the returns not yet in, Holden marked his future position on secession, declaring that "if Mr. Lincoln was elected yesterday, it will be the duty of the Southern people ...to strengthen their defenses in the Union...." He pointed out that even with a Republican presidential victory, only one of the three de-

⁴⁶Dumond, p. 91. ⁴⁷Sitterson, p. 168-169. ⁴⁸Standard, July 4, 1860.

⁴⁹Ibid., July 18, 1860. ⁵⁰Sitterson, p. 172-173.

⁵¹Standard, September, October, 1860.

partments of the government would be inimicable to Southern interests, and urged that Lincoln was intelligent enough to see the danger in any action which would "touch in the slightest respect the vital interests of the slave-holding States."⁵² When the results of the election were known, the secessionists called for immediate withdrawal from the Union. Holden, while denying that he was a "submissionist", continued to plead for caution:

The condition of the times calls for calmness of determination and firmness of action. Let passion be discarded. The foundations of a State, to be enduring must not be laid in passion or resentment. It is much easier to destroy than it is to construct. "Better to bear the ills we have, than fly to others that we know not of."⁵³

.
We stand like a rock against both disunion and submission. With both houses of Congress and the Supreme Court in our favor, we will try Mr. Lincoln.... Let us then, Watch and Wait.⁵⁴

Through the secession crisis, until the Confederate assault on Fort Sumter, this was to be the position of the Standard. Adopting the words "watch and wait" as his motto, Holden upheld the abstract right of secession for cause, but continued to insist that there was not yet cause sufficient.

While the majority of North Carolinians, both Whig and Democratic, apparently shared Holden's view, there was in the state a group favoring immediate secession, strongest in the counties having the largest slave population, and counting Governor Ellis among its leaders.⁵⁵ Not until Lincoln's call for troops, when it became evident that the state would

⁵²Ibid., November 7, 1860.

⁵³Ibid., November 14, 1860.

⁵⁴Ibid., November 24, 1860.

⁵⁵Sitterson, pp. 180-181.

be forced to choose a side in the impending conflict, were the secessionists in North Carolina able to muster sufficient public opinion for action, but the winter of 1860-1861 was marked by the efforts of this group to wrest control of the state from the conservative union group.

On November 20, Governor Ellis delivered a message to the legislature suggesting among other things a conference of the Southern states and a convention in North Carolina to consider the question of secession. Holden placed himself at the forefront of the anti-secessionists, charging that the existing situation did not call for such action.

There are portions...of the Governor's message to which we earnestly and respectfully object. We regard portions of it as tending to disunion without good cause, and we fear that the purpose of the Governor is to "precipitate" the State into the same position occupied by South-Carolina.⁵⁶

He warned the people that control of the Democratic party had fallen to the secessionists, and cautioned them to resist the efforts of these men to bring about disunion. Urging the necessity of purging this element from the party, Holden suggested that the desire for high public office had something to do with the demands for an independent South.⁵⁷

Through December and January, Holden continued to urge his policy of "watch and wait", and to defend himself against mounting charges that he had abandoned the Democratic party and become a "submissionist". Frequently declaring that the majority of the people of North Carolina remained opposed to secession, he announced his intention to be bound by their will. "Our appeal is to them. Their decision shall be law to us."⁵⁸ He professed to see a growing willingness in the North to respect the

⁵⁶Standard, November 24, 1860. ⁵⁷Ibid., November 27, 1860.

⁵⁸Ibid., December 4, 1860.

position of the South, urging that they be given time to act,⁵⁹ and suggesting that a national constitutional convention be held, at which the border states could act as mediators.⁶⁰

At the same time, Holden began what was to be a recurring theme in his war-time campaign, the idea that this would be a "rich man's war and a poor man's fight." Declaring that secession was certain to result in war, he charged, "Those who are making the most noise for secession have no idea of serving in the ranks as 'high privates.' They must be Captains, Colonels, and Generals. Of course the honest, hard working people will have to foot the bill."⁶¹

In the beginning of January considerable excitement was generated in the state by the abortive seizure of Forts Caswell and Johnson, on the Cape Fear, by citizens of Wilmington. At Governor Ellis' order, the forts were returned to Federal authorities without bloodshed on either side,⁶² but this action and the apprehension that the forts might be garrisoned with Federal troops led to the passage of a measure, on January 30, 1861, calling for a vote for or against a convention to consider the question of secession, and for the election of delegates to attend this convention, if held. Although he had previously opposed the idea of a convention, Holden reacted favorably to the passage of the bill, apparently feeling that Union sentiment in the state would prevail in such a convention, a manifestation which would greatly hinder

⁵⁹Ibid., December 6,8,11,13,15,18,20,29,1860; January 2,23,30,1861.

⁶⁰Ibid., January 2, 1861. ⁶¹Ibid., January 23, 1861.

⁶²John G. Barrett, The Civil War in North Carolina (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1963), pp. 5-8.

the secessionist cause.⁶³ He called for the election of the strongest possible union men, being himself a candidate, and emphasized that the issue was not one of party, but one of union or disunion.⁶⁴ At the same time he intensified his campaign against the secessionists, broadening his "rich man's war" theme into a general threat of aristocratic government and loss of civil liberty. Noting that none of the seceded states had submitted its action to a popular vote, he declared:

The oligarchs are afraid to trust the ballot box. But it will not be so in this state....

.

Are we ready for aristocracies, high taxes, military rule, and general poverty and want? If so, let us go now for disunion....

.

But what if [the Republic] should perish! Mark it, good reader--mark it!--civil liberty, as it has been known and enjoyed in England and America, will perish with it....⁶⁵

Equally threatening was Holden's persistent warning that secession would mean war, chaos, the ruin of industry, and finally--abolition.

With the vote on the convention bill returning a majority of union delegates, including Holden, but rejecting the idea of a convention, the editor again declared himself the voice of the people, observing with some satisfaction that they had adopted his "watch and wait" slogan as their own.⁶⁶ He continued to call for a peaceful settlement within the Union, and to urge Union men to remain alert, as the secessionists were

⁶³Holden, in his Memoirs, p. 15, recounts a meeting on the day of the election with a fellow Union candidate, G. E. Badger, to whom he expressed his confidence that 80 union and 40 secession delegates would be elected. The actual numbers were 83 union and 37 secession.

⁶⁴Standard, February 6, 20, 27, 1861. ⁶⁵Ibid., February 6, 1861.

⁶⁶Ibid., March 6, 1861.

determined to ignore the will of the majority.

The will of the majority was fast changing, however. The failure of the peace convention at Washington, D. C. to achieve results became known shortly after the election, and discouraged many North Carolina unionists who had looked to it for some peaceful solution. Lincoln's inaugural address, which Holden declared was not unfriendly to the South--"It deprecates war and bloodshed, and it pleads for the Union"--⁶⁷ was interpreted by most North Carolinians as a warning that coercion would be employed against the seceded states.⁶⁸

Encouraged by the growing disillusionment with the cause of union, North Carolina secessionists became more active. County meetings and rallies were held around the state, and a call was issued for a convention of the "Southern Rights Party" to meet at Goldsboro, March 22-23. This meeting, attended by more than one thousand persons, served to organize the secessionists, who then began to campaign for a new convention bill.⁶⁹

With the confrontation at Fort Sumter, Holden charged that the extremists, North and South, were dragging the country to ruin. He condemned the Confederate action in firing on Sumter as an attempt to force secession on the border states. At the same time, however, he reaffirmed his opposition to coercion. The proper course for the border states now, he declared, was to continue to try to "command the peace," but to resist any attempt of the North to coerce the Southern states.⁷⁰

Lincoln's call for troops, making it evident that coercion was to be applied, and the secession of Virginia on April 17, led Holden--and

⁶⁷Ibid., March 13, 1861. ⁶⁸Sitterson, pp. 231-232.

⁶⁹Ibid., pp. 235-237. ⁷⁰Standard, April 17, 1861.

with him, North Carolina unionists almost to a man--to renounce the motto "watch and wait"--"We must now UNITE and ACT." Declaring the call for troops a proclamation of war, unjustified even by the Confederate "error" in firing on Sumter, he announced:

One heretofore for peace and the Union comes forward to say to you that this is a just and honorable war. It is a war which could not have been avoided. It has been forced upon us. We must fight! ⁷¹

With this declaration, Holden dropped his charges against the secessionists and the Confederacy, but continued to demand that the questions of secession and of union with the Confederacy be put to a popular vote. "The people should be fully consulted. The State can act with deliberation and dignity even in the midst of war." Joining a militia company formed for local defense of Raleigh,⁷² he devoted the Standard to rallying North Carolina to the cause of the South. He served as a delegate to the Convention which passed the ordinance of secession on May 20, 1861, voting for the measure. Of his role in the secession convention, Holden later wrote, "I with others signed the ordinance of secession under force of unavoidable circumstances."⁷³

⁷¹Ibid., April 24, 1861.

⁷²Ibid., May 1, 1861.

⁷³Holden, p. 52.

CHAPTER III

THEMES OF DIVISION

For a brief period after the secession of North Carolina, Holden gave his full support to the Confederate cause. "Out course is set, our purpose is fixed, to do our whole duty to North-Carolina and the South, at all hazards."⁷⁴ Almost every issue of the Standard noted newly organized companies of volunteers with praise, and encouraged North Carolinians to organize and arm. Holden did not long maintain his new course, however. Within weeks after the secession of the state, notes of dissatisfaction began to appear in the Standard, developing by 1863 into a full scale attack on the war effort. Much of this material was of a sort likely to encourage dissatisfaction within the state toward both the state and the Confederate governments. Such material included accusations of partisanship in government and charges that North Carolina was being unfairly treated by the Confederate government, that the war was "a rich man's war, and a poor man's fight", and that the Confederate Government was infringing upon the rights and liberties of the state and of the individual citizen. Holden was by no means the originator of much of this discontent, as these views were widely held in North Carolina, but he played a leading role in converting this general dissatisfaction into political action.

The first-mentioned of these divisive themes, the charge of partis-

⁷⁴Standard, June 5, 1861.

anship, is to be found for the most part in the early years of the war, and is devoted primarily to a defense of former Union men, including Holden himself, against imputations of disloyalty and against exclusion from participation in the government. From the beginning of the war, the Standard denied rumors of the existence of a "union league" or of a large body of disloyal citizens in North Carolina, attributing such rumors to the Northern press and to "cowardly original secessionists" within the state.⁷⁵ When forced to acknowledge that such a group apparently did exist, Holden hastened to deny that former union men were among the disloyal.⁷⁶ Announcing the coming election of Confederate Congressmen and Presidential Electors in the fall of 1861, he urged that former Union men not be proscribed, and called for the rejection of aparty spirit--"next to the abolitionists...the worst enemy North-Carolina ever had...."⁷⁷ Simultaneously, the Standard attacked the "original secessionists" or "destructives" as the true enemies of the people and of the South.

In the first years of the war, at least, it does not appear to have been the primary purpose of this line of argument to undermine the Confederate cause, but rather to protect and to further the position of Holden and his associates. Holden's action in signing the ordinance of secession had not been sufficient to restore him to the good graces of the Democratic party leadership, and he with other former Union men now found himself outside the political mainstream. This group, together with other discontented elements, soon found common ground, and by 1862, had coalesced sufficiently under Holden's leadership to permit the formation of a new political party, the Conservatives. This group first

⁷⁵Ibid., September 11, 18, 1861; February 5, 1862.

⁷⁶Ibid., March 12, 1862.

⁷⁷Ibid., September 14, 1861.

supported William A. Graham for governor in 1862, but when Graham declined to run, the names of several other persons, including Holden, John Gilmer, Bedford Brown, and Zebulon B. Vance were tentatively offered.⁷⁸ Vance was finally chosen as the strongest candidate. A former Whig, beginning his second term in the United States House of Representatives when the secession crisis climaxed, he had remained a unionist until the attack on Fort Sumter. He then resigned his seat in Congress and organized a company of "Rough and Ready Guards". Stationed in Eastern North Carolina, he was, in September, 1861, elected colonel of the Twenty-Sixth North Carolina Regiment and received his first combat experience at Newbern in March, 1862.⁷⁹ He was thus the ideal Conservative candidate, having opposed secession as long as possible, but supporting the war when it came.

The Democratic party, alarmed by this sudden political threat, adopted the name Confederate and nominated William Johnston, Commissary General of the state and president of the Charlotte and Columbia Railroad.⁸⁰ The campaign was largely carried on by the party newspapers, the Confederates charging that Vance's election would indicate to the North that Union sentiment was dominant in North Carolina, and the Conservatives calling for reform in government as essential to the successful prosecution of the war. The Standard, hailing Vance as the people's candidate, urged, "It is of the utmost importance that the government should be reformed. We have good constitutions, both State and

⁷⁸Ibid., May 7, 21, 1862.

⁷⁹Richard E. Yates, The Confederacy and Zeb Vance (Confederate Centennial Studies, No. 8; Tuscaloosa, Ala.:Confederate Publishing Co., 1958), pp. 15-18.

⁸⁰Raper, p. 497.

Confederate,...but the administration of the government must be reformed, and that speedily, or ruin will overtake us all."⁸¹ Against Confederate charges that Vance was the union candidate, Holden pointed to his military record, noting on the other hand that "the exploits of...Colonel Johnston, are confined to a narrow circle. He won his title among the pork and beans of the Commissary Department." The Standard also made much of Johnston's connection with the Charlotte and Columbia Railroad, declaring, "Mr. Johnston has shown, by establishing the South-Carolina guage in this State, and by turning our produce to Columbia and Charleston, instead of to Wilmington and to Beaufort, that his feelings are with South-Carolina."⁸² Throughout the campaign Vance was offered as the candidate for a vigorous prosecution of the war.

Vance won the election by a large majority, receiving 54,423 of the 74,871 votes cast, and carrying all but twelve counties in the state. The Conservatives also gained control of the State Legislature.⁸³ Holden announced that this Conservative victory amounted to a popular declaration that the old Union men were as loyal as any; "that the proscription against them shall cease; that favoritism and partyism in the government shall give place to patriotism."⁸⁴ The charges of favoritism temporarily disappeared from the pages of the Standard, to be revived by the split between Holden and Vance in 1864, and their opposition in the gubernatorial campaign that year. In the interim, Holden, who again became State Printer, continued to defend himself and the Conservative party against charges of disloyalty, blaming the "original secessionists" for

⁸¹Standard, May 28, 1862.

⁸²Ibid., August 6, 1862.

⁸³Yates, p. 18.

⁸⁴Standard, August 20, 1862.

Southern failures. With the 1864 campaign, the Standard resumed its accusations of partisanship in the state government, declaring that Vance had joined the "destructives", and had continued the "stallfederate" system in Raleigh, whereby government officials or "shade officers" were given special privileges.⁸⁵ Denunciations of the secessionists continued through the war.

A second divisive theme which may be found in the Standard was the further development of the "rich man's war" idea which Holden had used in his anti-secession campaign. He was by no means alone in expressing this idea, and in the western areas of the state particularly, it fell on fertile soil, as this region was dominantly a non-slaveholding, small farming region, where the enforcement of the conscription laws threatened to remove most of the male population and where the hardships of the war were felt with great severity. Holden frequently called attention to the various exemptions permitted by the conscription laws which tended to favor the wealthy, the most objectionable being the so-called "twenty-Negro law", which provided for the exemption of one white man for each twenty slaves, to serve as an overseer. He noted the hardships which each expansion of the age limits brought to the upland counties, where, he pointed out, three-fourths of the white men worked in the fields.⁸⁶

The Standard opposed the impressment and tithing acts of 1863 on similar grounds, charging that the latter, by which farmers were required to give one-tenth of their produce to the Richmond government, worked a particular hardship in these areas and was unequal in its

⁸⁵Ibid., June 22, 1864, et passim. These charges were not without some justification, as Vance and his associates evidently had purchased personal supplies from the state at government prices. See Yates, p. 105.

⁸⁶Ibid., February 5, August 20, 1862, March 1, 1863.

operation, as it tended to deprive these citizens of a large portion of their property, while those who held property in other forms were not equally oppressed.⁸⁷

In a similar vein, Holden frequently called attention to the treatment of the common soldier. As early as September, 1861, the Standard was protesting the poor pay allotted to the private, charging that in most cases he did not receive even that.⁸⁸ This theme persisted throughout the war. As late as 1864, Holden was still urging the cause of the "humble private who fought like a lion and died...", while both the praise and the pay went to the officers.⁸⁹

This entire line of argument was condemned by Holden's enemies as part of an intent to create dissatisfaction with the Confederate Government and with the war effort (as it no doubt did), but as the hardships of the war increased it became an increasingly popular and telling argument. Holden was able to note on several occasions that his subscription list, particularly "west of the Ridge", was growing,⁹⁰ indicating that an increasing portion of the population agreed with his views.

Another divisive theme appearing in the Standard, again reflecting the thinking of many North Carolinians, was the charge that the state was being unfairly treated among the Confederate States. The first comment of this nature in the paper appeared shortly after the act of secession, when Holden noted that the Confederate Government at Montgomery had fired no salute when word arrived of the secession of North Carolina, although this had been done in response to the secession

⁸⁷Ibid., March 17, 1863.

⁸⁸September 11, 25, 1861.

⁸⁹Ibid., May 18, 1864.

⁹⁰Ibid., September 3, 1862; May 8, 1863.

of the other states.⁹¹ Other petty complaints followed. When the Confederacy, in September, 1861, acted to reimburse Florida \$300,000 for damage suffered from Federal attacks, Holden announced, "We are opposed to petting any state above another...."⁹² On another occasion, reporting that the war was not going well in Virginia, he declared that it was "high time that South-Carolina, Georgia, Alabama and the other States had thrown a larger force into Virginia."⁹³

Of a more serious nature, and more disturbing to many North Carolinians, was the charge, frequent in the Standard, that while the state was carrying more than her share of the burden of the war, she was not receiving the recompense due her. A major issue was the matter of military promotion. While the state provided about one-sixth of the total Confederate troops, the number of high-ranking officers from North Carolina remained far below this percentage. Of eight full generals in the Confederate Army, none was a North Carolinian. Of twenty-one lieutenant generals, two were from the state; of ninety-nine major generals, there were twenty; of four hundred eighty brigadeers, there were twenty.⁹⁴ A natural result of this was that many North Carolina regiments were incorporated into brigades from other states, under the command of non-North Carolinians. This situation gave rise to frequent complaints within the state and among North Carolina troops, and Governor Vance frequently called it to the attention of the Confederate government.⁹⁵

⁹¹Ibid., June 11, 1861. ⁹²Ibid., September 11, 1861.

⁹³Ibid., July 24, 1861.

⁹⁴Richard Bardolph, "Inconstant Rebels: Desertion of North Carolina Troops in the Civil War," North Carolina Historical Review, XLI (1964), 3-7.

⁹⁵Yates, p. 41.

Further dissatisfaction was created in the state by the manner in which conscription was enforced, as conscripts had been promised the privilege of choosing their regiment if they entered the service willingly, but were subsequently being assigned to regiments without regard to this agreement. This matter again brought Governor Vance into conflict with the Confederate government, as he warned Davis that the enforcement of a law so unpopular was difficult at best, and was made increasingly so by this abuse. He also reminded Davis of the political situation in North Carolina--"that the original advocates of secession no longer hold the ear of our people"--and that the continuing support of the former Union men was necessary to hold North Carolina for the Confederacy.⁹⁶ Holden blamed this policy for desertion among North Carolina troops, and called for compliance with the agreements made with the conscripts. "If men are to be handcuffed to fight for liberty, let them at least have those rights which the law secures to them...."⁹⁷

In the matter of conscription, further offense was given to North Carolinians by the appointment in 1863 of a Virginian, Colonel T. P. August, to serve as enrolling officer for North Carolina conscripts, leading Vance to demand of Secretary of War Seddon that some more satisfactory arrangement be made.⁹⁸

Holden lost no opportunity to complain of all these matters, blaming the situation on the prejudice of the original secessionists against North Carolina because of her slowness in seceding, and sometimes going to the length of urging the people to resist Confederate authorities.

⁹⁶Vance to Davis, U. S., War Department, War of the Rebellion, the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies, Series I, LI, pt.2, pp. 807-810, cited in Yates, pp. 94-95, hereinafter cited as OR.

⁹⁷Standard, November 26, 1862.

⁹⁸Barrett, p. 185.

In civil as well as military offices, there was much feeling in North Carolina that the state was being discriminated against. There was some basis for this, as during the entire life of the Confederacy, cabinet appointees from the state number two--Thomas Bragg, who served briefly (1861-62) as attorney general, and George Davis, who served in the same capacity in 1864-65--while the number of North Carolinians in other appointive positions was "not conspicuous" in comparison with numbers from other Confederate States.⁹⁹ Holden frequently noted that the state held too few positions in the Confederate Government, as in November, 1861, when a change in the cabinet resulted in a vacancy in the attorney generalship, the Standard declared:

North-Carolina has been proverbially modest in preferring her claims to representation in the cabinet.... None have [sic] furnished more men or means to support the war, or moved with greater alacrity in defense of the South, all other things being equal. Yet she has shared meagrely in the offices of the government.¹⁰⁰

Holden recieved the news of the appointment of former Governor Bragg to this post with praise,¹⁰¹ but the following spring this complaint reappeared, when he noted that North Carolina had received only two of the thirty-three committee chairmanships of the permanent Congress, these being "of an ordinary character."¹⁰²

The single incident of this nature which created the strongest protest in the state was the appointment of a Virginian, Bradford, to supervise the collection of produce under the "tithing law". Holden vigor-

⁹⁹Hugh T. Lefler and A. R. Newsome, North Carolina (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1963), p. 430.

¹⁰⁰November 6, 1861. ¹⁰¹Ibid., November 27, 1861.

¹⁰²Ibid., March 5, 1862.

ously protested this appointment and called on the people to resist it.¹⁰³

In addition to these varied charges of unfair treatment, the Standard frequently suggested that the defense of the state was being neglected. The matter of the coastal defenses of the state was a constant source of irritation between North Carolina and the Confederacy, and again, Holden was not alone in complaining of the issue. From the beginning, the war did not go well in North Carolina. In August, 1861, Hatteras fell to the enemy after a brief assault, and the forts protecting the inlets at Oregon and Ocracoke were abandoned without a fight, leaving Albemarle and Pamlico sounds open to enemy operations. The following February, Roanoke Island also fell to Federal forces, who then easily occupied Elizabeth City, Washington, Plymouth, and Newbern. From this vantage point, Federal troops began raiding the Eastern counties and threatening the Wilmington-Weldon Railroad, vital as a supply line for the Confederate forces in Virginia. This unsatisfactory situation created serious discontent in North Carolina, and Vance constantly pressed the President and the Secretary of War to provide adequate troops for the defense of the state, although Confederate strategy called for only a sufficient force in North Carolina to prevent capture or serious damage to the Wilmington-Weldon line.¹⁰⁴

The Standard frequently called attention to the precarious position of Eastern North Carolina, urging from the beginning of the war that the coastal defenses must be strengthened. With the fall of Roanoke Island, Holden declared that the casualties there were "the predestined victims of a military murder, which resulted from neglect or inefficiency....", and declared that the treatment of North Carolina in regard to her defense

¹⁰³Ibid., July 3, 14, 1863.

¹⁰⁴Yates, pp. 20-21.

called for investigation "both here and at Richmond."¹⁰⁵ He frequently noted the condition of the Eastern counties, calling this area the granary of the South, and questioning the failure of the Confederate Government to devote a larger force to the defense of the area.

We are not ignorant of the claims of other States and sections.... But is it not a matter of the first importance to our interests in Virginia that the Wilmington and Weldon Railroad be preserved intact, and that the rich crops of those counties be placed beyond the reach of danger? ¹⁰⁶

Holden also frequently expressed concern for the defense of the state as a whole, objecting to new levies of troops and supporting the "Ten-Regiment Bill" introduced in the State Legislature at the beginning of 1863 to raise ten regiments for local defense, in conflict with Confederate conscription laws.¹⁰⁷ Here again, local jealousy came into play, as he frequently opposed further contributions of troops from North Carolina until other Confederate states should supply their full quotas.

This theme of unfair treatment for North Carolina was one of the most effective divisive arguments to be found in the pages of the Standard, and became a major factor in the peace movement in 1863-64, when it was usually mentioned in the resolutions of the peace meetings as a major grievance.

¹⁰⁵Standard, February 19, 1862.

¹⁰⁶Ibid., October 15, 1862.

¹⁰⁷Ibid., January 16, 1863.

CHAPTER IV

THREATS OF DESPOTISM

One of the dominant themes to be found in the Standard is the threat of despotism through the loss of civil liberty and state sovereignty. This theme, raised in connection with almost every aspect of Confederate policy throughout the war, had been foreshadowed in the secession crisis by Holden's frequent warnings of the aristocratic and despotic nature of the Confederacy.

Always central in Holden's writings was his insistence on popular government. During the debate on secession, he had maintained this position, and in the secession convention he was among those supporting an unsuccessful attempt to require popular ratification of the ordinance of secession.¹⁰⁸ Throughout the war, the statement of the principles of the editor carried periodically in the Standard invariably began, "The Democratic principle--that is--the right of the people to rule." As early as December, 1861, stating that constitutional liberty no longer existed in the North, he warned against an increasing tendency in that direction in the South. Charging that there was an idea abroad in Virginia to limit suffrage, he demanded the right to vote for every white, free, tax paying male, and cautioned his readers, "Every attack, whether open or covert, on the right of suffrage as at present exercised among us, proceeds from the friends of strong government and the enemies

¹⁰⁸Ibid., June 12, 1861.

of free institutions."¹⁰⁹ In 1863, with his commitment to the peace movement, Holden asked that the people not hesitate to voice their opinions on the matter, and suggested that any action directed toward peace should be subject to popular approval. He urged that the people remember "that they are sovereign--that they are the masters of those who administer the government--that the government was established by them, for their benefit...."¹¹⁰

In connection with his insistence on popular sovereignty, Holden consistently condemned the governments of North Carolina and of the Confederacy for their policy of sometimes conducting government business in secret, and called for the publication of votes on matters such as the conscription act, which he opposed. While he admitted the occasional necessity of secret sessions, he insisted that "matters in which the people are directly concerned should be accessible to them."¹¹¹

It is very difficult to persuade an honest man that deception can at any time be good policy; but when it is systematically practiced to the practical overthrow of the principles of government itself, it is a declaration that the government is an evil and ought to be abolished.¹¹²

The Standard fought throughout the war for freedom of the press, as was to be expected. In January, 1862, Holden warned his readers that the question of restricting the press was then being discussed in secret session at Richmond and asked:

Will the Southern people submit to this entering wedge to despotic rule? If so, let them get ready to yield every shred of civil freedom. If the Congress in the face of the Constitution have the right to pass such a bill, what is to hinder them from depriving the people of the freedom of

¹⁰⁹Ibid., December 11, 1861.

¹¹⁰Ibid., July 17, 1863.

¹¹¹Ibid., March 5, 1862.

¹¹²Ibid., August 13, 1862.

speech, of the right to discuss or to investigate the conduct of their public agents, or to nullify or suspend habeas corpus? ¹¹³

The possibility of the loss of the privilege of habeas corpus was a major theme in Holden's warnings of despotism. In October, 1862, he noted the passage of a bill in the Confederate House of Representatives permitting the President to suspend the writ in certain cases.

Such a measure, if passed, would place the personal liberty of every citizen of the Confederate States at the mercy of the President. Can such a measure be necessary? We do not believe it is.--What are we fighting for? Constitutional liberty. Let us not, then, destroy it while we are in the very act of securing it. ¹¹⁴

With the passage in 1864 of a measure authorizing President Davis to suspend the writ in cases of treason, resistance of Confederate authority, incitement to resistance, or adherence to the enemy, Holden announced the temporary suspension of the Standard in protest. This action was doubtless motivated in part by self-defense, as he was among those clearly intended by the act. Through the efforts of Vance, who urged Davis that such action would only weaken the campaign against the peace movement, the writ was never suspended in North Carolina after the passage of the 1864 law, although suspensions did occur in every other state. ¹¹⁵

In his defense of civil liberty, Holden also noted the failure of the Confederate government to create the Supreme Court provided for by the Constitution, charging that this left the executive and legislative departments free to violate the Constitution, as the citizen had no re-

¹¹³January 22, 1862. ¹¹⁴Ibid., October 22, 1862.

¹¹⁵Clarence D. Douglas, "Conscription and the Writ of Habeas Corpus in North Carolina," Historical Papers of the Trinity College Historical Society, Series XIV (Durham: The Seeman Printery, 1922) p. 37.

course.¹¹⁶ On another occasion he asked whether the absence of a court did not mean that the citizens of the Confederacy were under not the government provided by the Constitution, but rather "under a government of one man, and that man President Davis."¹¹⁷

Parallel to his defense of individual liberty, Holden constantly deplored the threat of Confederate violation of state sovereignty, always refusing to admit that the exigencies of war might necessitate a great degree of centralization. While affirming his loyalty to the Confederacy, he usually emphasized his primary loyalty to North Carolina, and held it his duty to criticize any measure "which puts at hazard and eminently jeopard[sic] the vital interests of North-Carolina, especially during this war."¹¹⁸ This position led him to oppose even measures which he admitted were of value, as on one occasion when he declared himself gratified by the interest of President Davis in the construction of a railroad through the state to Danville, Virginia, but added, "We do not concede to the Confederate government the right to engage in works of internal improvement in the States...."¹¹⁹

While the charge that the rights of states were being infringed was brought up in connection with almost every alleged violation of civil liberty, Holden especially emphasized this in connection with the conscription laws and the frequent conflicts between Confederate military authorities and state officials over matters which he felt lay within

¹¹⁶Standard, September 24, 1862. ¹¹⁷Ibid., February 24, 1863.

¹¹⁸Ibid., November 27, 1863.

¹¹⁹Ibid., November 27, 1863. Upholding the doctrine of state sovereignty may not have been the primary motive in this case, as North Carolinians generally opposed the construction of this road, fearing that it would mean abandonment of the Wilmington-Weldon line, and that consequently the defense of the Eastern part of the state would be further neglected. See Yates, p. 22.

the province of the civil authorities.

Despite the grave problems facing the Confederate Government in trying to raise and maintain an army, Holden steadily opposed the use of conscription, denouncing it as the "growth of older and despotic soils."¹²⁰ Publishing a résumé of the Conscription Act of April, 1862, he declared that it ignored the rights of the states and violated the Constitution. "We regard it as inexpedient, unnecessary, oppressive, and unconstitutional.... We enter our protest against it."¹²¹ The Standard continued to protest each further expansion of the age limits, and throughout the war maintained that a volunteer system would have been better. "It was a dark day for the Southern Confederacy, when the volunteering system was abandoned, and the Conscription resorted to. We doubt very much whether liberty can be achieved by despotic means."¹²² His attitude toward conscription reflected the opinion of many North Carolina leaders, including Vance, although the Governor insisted that the law must be obeyed.¹²³ The state, as Holden asserted in the Standard of January 2, 1863, accepted conscription as a necessity, but "never acquiesced in the principle of conscription...."

The attempts of the Confederate government to reduce the shortage of arms by impressment, under orders from Davis, provided Holden with another occasion to charge violation of state rights and constitutional liberty. The Confederate Constitution, he argued, guaranteed the right to keep and bear arms, and the state needed whatever arms its citizens had for its

¹²⁰Ibid., September 3, 1862. ¹²¹Ibid., April 23, 1862.

¹²²Ibid., November 26, 1862. His position never changed; years later he noted in his Memoirs (p. 27): "The war should have been a voluntary one, and if force had been necessary to be used to put men in the Southern army, that force should have been used by the states themselves, and not by the Confederate Government."

¹²³Douglas, p. 10-12.

own defense, yet Jefferson Davis "is scarcely warm in his seat, to which he was called by the general acclaim of the whole people, before he 'requests' one of his agents to violate material portions of the Constitution which he has sworn to support." Holden added that he did not charge Davis with "improper" motive, but warned the people to be on guard against despotism.¹²⁴

Actions of Confederate military authorities in conflict with civil authorities in North Carolina was a major source of disagreement between Raleigh and Richmond. The Standard protested each such case. When the Reverend R. J. Graves was arrested for treason, and removed to Castle Thunder at Richmond without benefit of civil action, Holden charged that the action was "the very essence of despotism."¹²⁵ He similarly objected to the constant arrests of supposed conscripts and deserters by Confederate troops without civil warrants. With the publication in early 1863 of Secretary of War Seddon's report to Davis on the civilian prisoners being held under military authority at Salisbury prison, he declared correctly that in many cases these persons had been denied due process of law, as proper charges had not been filed and trial was being denied. There were, in fact, three prisoners listed in the report with no charges preferred.¹²⁶

The most serious disagreement in this area arose over the action of Confederate military personnel in re-arresting conscripts freed by North Carolina Chief Justice Pearson on writs of habeas corpus. These cases involved men whose substitutes in military service had subsequently been

¹²⁴Standard, April 16, 1862.

¹²⁵Ibid., December 12, 16, 1862.

¹²⁶Ibid., April 17, 1863. For a detailed account of this problem, see Yates, Chapter IV. Governor Vance was kept busy throughout the war investigating these cases and securing the release of persons improperly held.

conscripted under the broadening age limits, and who had then been conscripted themselves to replace their substitutes. Justice Pearson had ruled that men losing their substitutes in this manner were not liable to conscription under laws not in effect at the time the substitutes had been hired. The military authorities were advised by the Secretary of War at Richmond that this opinion was not to be regarded as binding, and the arrests continued. Said the Standard: "It is cool, conclusive, and contemptuous. The opinion of the Chief Justice of our State is trampled under foot by the Military...."¹²⁷ This conflict between the state and the Confederacy continued until Vance, insisting that the Confederate authorities must accept the decisions of the State Courts as binding, was able to arrange for a decision on the matter by the full Court in June, 1864. As he had hoped, the Court overruled Justice Pearson and the matter ceased to be an issue.¹²⁸

Holden carried his warnings of despotism so far as to charge, as he had in the pre-war period, that a desire to establish a monarchy was to be found in the Confederacy. In December, 1862, commenting on an article from the Atlanta Intelligencer which listed several acts of a nature indicating such a tendency, Holden expressed his fears that such a desire did exist, and even stated that he "knew" of such sentiment among North Carolina "destructives". He urged the people to be wary of this tendency, to "hold to the great sheet anchor of your liberties--the Bill of Rights--the Constitution--the due enforcement of the laws--the subordination of the military to the civil power--the liberty of the press and freedom of speech."¹²⁹

¹²⁷May 29, 1863. ¹²⁸Yates, pp. 58-62.

¹²⁹Standard, December 31, 1862.

CHAPTER V

THEMES OF DEFEAT--THE PEACE MOVEMENT

Parallel to themes of division and warnings of despotism, the pages of the Standard were filled with material of a discouraging or defeatist nature, culminating in 1863 in the peace movement. From the beginning of the war the tone of the Standard was not wholly optimistic. At the outset, Holden urged that the defeat of the North was possible, but that it must be accomplished quickly.¹³⁰ Within a month, however, he was expressing the view that the war would probably be a long one,¹³¹ and by the following spring he was denouncing the "fantastic blindness" of those who had expected a quick victory.¹³²

In the early months of the war, the Standard frequently called attention to the weakness of the defenses of the state, and while urging the necessity of stopping the enemy in Virginia, reported that events there were discouraging.¹³³ In these first months also, Holden raised the spectre of a slave revolt if the militia of the state were to be called out for the general defense.¹³⁴

By late 1862, the Standard was openly pessimistic in regard to the war. In an editorial entitled "This Bloody War", appearing on October 8, 1862, Holden declared that the ruin to both North and South was already

¹³⁰Ibid., July 18, 1861.

¹³¹Ibid., August 14, 1861.

¹³²Ibid., March 5, 1862.

¹³³July 24, 1861.

¹³⁴Ibid., November 13, 1861.

incalculable, and asked, "Where is the ruin to end?" The South, he argued, could hope for nothing from the North or from Europe,¹³⁵ but must rely on God and "the valor of our troops." This editorial seems to mark the turning point in the attitude of the Standard. Prior to this time there had been occasional comment of an encouraging nature, but for the remainder of the war, its view was almost wholly pessimistic.

Overtone of impending defeat frequently were explicit in Holden's comments on other matters, as in his threats of disaster to the state through the enforcement of conscription and impressment. In some cases, more subtle notes of defeatism may be detected, as in his observation on January 2, 1863, that there was danger that the Richmond-Petersburg Railroad might be cut. Holden asserted that Lee would be able to hold Richmond in spite of this, but as it was generally conceded that this supply line was essential to the defense of the Confederate Capital, such an observation would be disquieting. In other cases, what may be regarded as defeatist was merely accurate reporting of the events of the war, which were in themselves sufficiently discouraging. Where other papers frequently minimized Southern losses, the Standard did not. One such example is the Battle of Gettysburg, which Holden reported as a serious defeat for the South, while the State Journal (the party newspaper) declared a month after the battle, "Our army is in splendid condition, and is stronger than when it crossed into Pennsylvania."¹³⁶ Such contrasts were common, and left Holden vulnerable to the charge of defeatism.

In the weeks following his October 8 editorial, the editor frequently

¹³⁵Never, from the beginning of the war, did the Standard regard European intervention on the behalf of the South as a possibility.

¹³⁶August 6, 1863.

took note of the condition of the Eastern part of the state, and hinted darkly at further Federal occupation. He also began to raise the threat of starvation, which became a recurring theme in the Standard, closely tied to his opposition to impressment and conscription in his appeals to the poorer sections of the state.¹³⁷ As the war progressed, he ever more frequently warned of total subjugation, military occupation, and immediate abolition of slavery.

Throughout the war, Holden opposed as hopeless, any effort of the Southern armies to take the offensive. Receiving word of Lee's invasion of Western Maryland in the fall of 1862, he declared that such a maneuver destroyed any hope of an early end to the war, and would surely fail. "When was it ever known in history that five millions invaded and conquered a peace from twenty-three millions?" The South, he declared, would do well just to defend herself, while such an expedition could only weaken her and leave her open to further invasions by Federal troops. He concluded: "The prospect is by no means bright or cheering. We are no alarmist, but we must deal frankly with our readers. Still greater sacrifices and sufferings are before us."¹³⁸ The Standard took a similar position in regard to the Gettysburg campaign,¹³⁹ and as the war progressed, abandoned all hope that the South would be able to hold what territory she possessed, much less reconquer what she had lost.¹⁴⁰

The most striking and discouraging of all Holden's editorials appeared in the July 17, 1863, issue of the Standard, in which he com-

¹³⁷Standard, March 17, 1863; May 18, June 15, 1864.

¹³⁸Ibid., October 29, 1862. ¹³⁹Ibid., July 14, 1863.

¹⁴⁰Ibid., August 25, 1863.

mitted himself openly to the peace movement.

It is a great crime, especially at a time like this, to conceal the truth from the people. We intend to tell them the truth as far as we know it, let the consequences be what they may.

From the beginning of the war...the enemy has slowly but surely gained on us.... We have lost Missouri, Kentucky, Tennessee, the Mississippi valley, Texas, Louisiana, Arkansas, and considerable portions of other states.... Our recruits in the way of conscripts will scarcely keep our regiments full, and we cannot hope to add materially to our forces. Our fighting population is pretty well exhausted. Everybody knows this.--The North knows it and so does Europe. On the contrary, our enemies, flushed with triumph, have a large army in the field, and their President has just called for three hundred thousand more. He will get them.... We have nothing to hope for from foreign nations, and just as our cause is, we see no indications that Providence is about to interpose in our behalf. The war, then, will go on. One side or the other must conquer. Will five million whites conquer twenty millions of the same race? Northern troops are not cowards, --they fight nearly as well as Southern troops. We cannot achieve signal victories over them on their own soil.

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These are sad truths, but we feel it to be our duty to lay them before our readers.

From this time forward, the Standard was openly and plainly opposed to continuing the war effort, calling in every issue for peace talks, and declaring that the only outcome of continued fighting would be the total defeat and subjugation of the South.

The Standard had begun to look toward peace early in the war. In the beginning, while maintaining that a majority of the Northern people opposed the war, Holden declared that "they appear to be still deceived as to the real purpose of the South. It is folly to talk now of a reconstruction."¹⁴¹ "The North may as well understand us, that the South will never give up. Our very women will go the the battlefield if need be,

¹⁴¹Ibid., July 3, 1861.

before the South shall be conquered."¹⁴² By mid-1862, however, the Standard began to look toward peace in the near future as a desirable objective, and Holden was finding it increasingly necessary to defend himself against charges that he favored reconstruction.¹⁴³ His editorials from this time forward were punctuated with expressions of hope for peace, calling on "clergy and Christians" to pray for such a consummation. He began to pave the way toward better relations by urging that a distinction must be made between the Northern People and their government and by deploring the cultivation of hatred for the former.¹⁴⁴ The "best friends of humanity and the truest of patriots," he insisted, were the advocates of peace in both sections.¹⁴⁵

What appears to be the first gesture in the direction of an organized movement for peace appeared in the June 5, 1863, issue of the paper, as Holden published, without comment, the following excerpt from a letter to the editor:

Whenever the proper time arrives I think the newspapers North and South ought to cultivate and encourage a better feeling between the sections. Elect sensible and good men, who will make at least one effort for an honorable settlement of our differences.

The reaction to this "feeler" must have been satisfactory, as Holden the following week urged peace talks, and suggested that the South must be willing to compromise.

Is it not time that good men everywhere were uniting on some means to arrest this awful evil? Negotiations must be resorted to at some future period, for to suppose

¹⁴²Ibid., June 12, 1863. ¹⁴³Ibid., June 25, 1862.

¹⁴⁴Ibid., March 17, June 12, 1863. ¹⁴⁵Ibid., June 12, 1863.

otherwise is to anticipate an endless war; and the States on this continent can never live in peace without some mutual concessions and compromises.¹⁴⁶

In almost every issue thereafter, Holden called for peace talks. He urged that the South must continue fighting, but at the same time must make an effort to end the conflict by negotiations, before her bargaining position became even weaker. While his proposals as to the form which negotiations should take varied, he always stipulated that any action taken must be subject to popular ratification. In an editorial of July 17, 1863, he offered a proposal, which he attributed to an unnamed friend, that the next congressional elections turn on the question of appointing a commission to treat for peace, with the premise that their actions be submitted to the people. While the Standard usually looked toward action in cooperation with other Southern states, Holden did suggest on at least one occasion that negotiations by a separate state might be necessary, as the constitutional position of the North estopped negotiations with the Confederacy as a government.¹⁴⁷ This led to the charge, which he was later to deny, that he favored the secession of North Carolina from the Confederacy, and the negotiation of a separate peace. Ultimately, in early 1864, Holden came to favor a convention to work for peace.

The course of the Standard met with considerable public approval, for during the latter part of the summer of 1863 more than one hundred "peace meetings" were held in the state, beginning on July 14, in Green County.¹⁴⁸ The resolutions passed at these meetings were very nearly identical, recounting the grievances of North Carolina against the Con-

¹⁴⁶Ibid. ¹⁴⁷Ibid., August 25, 1863.

¹⁴⁸Ibid., July 21, 1863.

federacy in such matters as military administration, unfair treatment, out-of-state officials in North Carolina, conscription, tithing, and impressment, and invariably concluding by approving Holden's position. The resolutions frequently used the language, as well as the motifs, of the Standard, leading to the accusation, which Holden always denied, that they originated in his office. The resolutions of the first few meetings did not mention the subject of peace, but by the end of July, they began to incorporate a proposition declaring "That we would hail with joy any movement by the great body of the people North and South, which might promise to lead to an honorable and lasting peace."¹⁴⁹ By this time almost all the correspondence published in the Standard indicated a desire for peace, and Holden stated that he was receiving two hundred letters a week, nearly all in this vein.¹⁵⁰

As was to be expected, the editor's activities soon became a source of increasing concern for both state and Confederate leaders, and ultimately led to an open break between Holden and Governor Vance. While the Governor was in sympathy with many of the complaints expressed in the Standard and in the peace meetings, and himself worked constantly with the Richmond authorities for the alleviation of these grievances, he could not approve Holden's course in regard to peace. He agreed that peace should be sought, but felt that it must be by action of the Confederate Government rather than by individual states. Vance attempted to persuade Holden to drop his support of the peace movement, and prevailed upon other prominent men in the state to use their influence to discourage him, but with little success. Holden would agree only to

¹⁴⁹Ibid., July 28, 1863.

¹⁵⁰Ibid., July 21, 1863.

declare that he and Vance were not in accord on the peace question. Despairing of this course, but unwilling to be the author of the inevitable clash between himself and the powerful editor, the governor hesitated to attack Holden openly. He did, however, privately urge the party press to denounce him, and issued a proclamation on September 8, 1863, calling for compliance with the laws, however distasteful, and warning the people of the state that the evils of one revolution could not be cured by starting another.

At the same time, however, Vance defended Holden from repression by the Richmond government, personally calling on Davis to inform him that most of the grievances on which the peace movement fed could be removed by fairer treatment of the state. Determined to maintain the supremacy of civil law in his state, he warned Davis that the use of force would only strengthen Holden's hand.¹⁵¹

Holden's activities also created concern in the army. By the second year of the war, desertion had become a serious problem for the Confederacy, and it was generally acknowledged that North Carolina troops were the worst in this respect. Confederate military authorities blamed much of this on the "peace mongering" of the Standard, as did many of the soldiers.¹⁵² To this charge, Holden retorted that desertion resulted from the hardships and disasters at the front and the inefficient and partisan course of the authorities at home, and filled the pages of the Standard with editorials and notices deploring desertion and urging absentees to return to the armies.¹⁵³

¹⁵¹Yates, pp. 87-91.

¹⁵²Bardolph, p. 184.

¹⁵³A complete listing of such material would be much too long, but examples may be found in the issues for July 30, August 27, October 8, 1862; March 31, June 26, 1863; August 17, September 7, 28, 1864, and March 22, 1865.

Nonetheless, attempts were made to prevent the circulation of the Standard in the armies, both officially and unofficially.¹⁵⁴

A more direct attempt to suppress the Standard occurred on September 9, 1863, when members of Benning's Georgia Brigade, passing through Raleigh, wrecked Holden's office but failed to destroy the press. Governor Vance found it necessary to come to the scene to disperse the mob. The following day, friends of Holden retaliated with a more thorough job of wrecking the rival State Journal, smashing the press. Again Vance was called upon to quiet the crowd and to prevent similar action against the Register. For several days thereafter there were threats of further violence from troops passing through the city, and Vance was finally forced to request that President Davis prevent soldiers passing through North Carolina from entering Raleigh.¹⁵⁵ The Standard resumed publication on October 2, and the call for peace continued unabated.

When the November congressional elections resulted in the election of a number of peace men,¹⁵⁶ Governor Vance became convinced that the Confederacy must at least make a gesture toward negotiations, advising Davis that this, if it failed, would unify the people of the state behind the war effort, and would in any event remove the chief weapon of the peace group. Davis replied that this had been done with no success, and urged Vance to take a strong stand against the peace movement.¹⁵⁷ Vance's associates offered similar advice,

¹⁵⁴Raper, p. 71; Standard, October 16, 30, 1863.

¹⁵⁵Raper, pp. 69-70; Standard, October 2, 1863.

¹⁵⁶Estimates vary on this point. The Petersburg, Virginia, Register (November 27, 1863) claimed that five of the ten congressmen were peace men; the Standard (February 3, 1864) claimed seven. Quoted in Yates, p. 94.

¹⁵⁷OR, Ser.I, LI, pt.2, pp. 807-810, cited in Yates, pp. 94-95.

and when he learned that the peace men intended to oppose his re-election in 1864 if he refused to call a convention to seek peace, he finally resolved to break with Holden. Holden denied that it was his purpose to defeat Vance, asserting that the "people of the State have a right to re-elect Gov. Vance and they have a right to defeat him. We shall go with the people hereafter, as heretofore."¹⁵⁸ A call for a convention was begun, however, with a meeting in Johnston County, where a series of resolutions were passed endorsing both Vance and Holden and calling for such a convention. Holden denied authorship of the resolutions, which were reportedly composed by him, but supported this meeting and the several which followed.

As Vance determined to oppose the peace movement in North Carolina, the Confederate Government attacked the movement with the suspension of the writ of habeas corpus on February 15, 1864, effective until August 1, in cases involving, among other things, "advising or inciting others to abandon the Confederate cause, or to resist the Confederate States, or to adhere to the enemy."¹⁵⁹ Holden temporarily suspended publication of the Standard, ostensibly in protest, and Governor Vance protested to Davis that the measure, if enforced, would only hamper his efforts to defeat the peace movement in the state.¹⁶⁰

Vance began his campaign against the Holden forces at Wilkesboro, on February 22, in a speech distributed throughout the state, denouncing the call for a convention and urging the people to stand by the Confed-

¹⁵⁸Standard, January 20, 1864.

¹⁵⁹Douglas, p. 37.

¹⁶⁰Yates, pp. 99-100. This protest resulted in an angry correspondence between Vance and Davis, till the latter requested that Vance confine himself to official business in any future communication.

eracy. Holden responded by resuming publication on April 6, to announce his candidacy for the governorship, standing on his record as a conservative "after the straightest sect" and charging that Vance had abandoned the Conservatives and joined the secessionists.

The campaign which followed was marked by vicious attacks on the part of the candidates, with Vance stumping the state, while Holden campaigned through the Standard. His cause was badly damaged by accusations that he belonged to the "Red-strings" or Heroes of America, a secret organization for the purpose of securing reconstruction. Holden denied membership in the organization,¹⁶¹ and final proof that he belonged was never offered, but apparently members of the group were instructed to vote for him and were told that he was a member.¹⁶²

When the results of the vote in the army were known, two weeks before the regular elections, it became apparent that Holden would lose. The final vote of the state was probably 57,873 to 14,432,¹⁶³ although the Standard reported the returns as 43,579 to 28,982.¹⁶⁴ Holden charged throughout that he was defeated by fraud; that intimidation was used against the soldiers, whose ballots were reportedly opened and examined,¹⁶⁵ that troops were sent to polling places to threaten civilians,¹⁶⁶ and that non-North Carolinians were permitted to vote.¹⁶⁷ He may have been justified to some extent in these charges, as there were occasional instances

¹⁶¹Standard, July 6, 13, 27, 1864. ¹⁶²Yates, p. 106; Raper, p. 83.

¹⁶³North Carolina, Senate. Journal, 1864-1865, p. 75; cited in Yates, p. 98.

¹⁶⁴Standard, August 17, 1864. ¹⁶⁵Ibid., August 3, 1864.

¹⁶⁶Ibid., July 29, August 3, 1864. ¹⁶⁷Ibid., August 3, 1864.

of complaints by soldiers that they had not been permitted to vote for Holden.¹⁶⁸ Also, while it was customary that the ballots or "tickets", which each candidate printed for himself, were printed on white paper, Vance had his printed on yellow paper,¹⁶⁹ thus making it possible to identify the votes as they were cast, which would suggest that some intimidation was intended.

Following the election, Holden announced that he was "neither dismayed nor depressed by the result of the recent elections in the state," but for the moment took a more cautious position on the peace question, denying that he had favored the withdrawal of the state from the Confederacy or reconstruction. He declared, however, that his views on the war were unchanged and that he would continue to follow the will of the people.¹⁷⁰

In the same issue Holden published an excerpt from the Richmond Enquirer, with endorsements by the Conservative (Vance's party paper) and the Confederate at Raleigh, calling for an armistice and declaring that "if the Union can be restored...the recognition of the Confederate States would not stand in the way." These papers had opposed the peace movement, and while noting his gratification that they were "coming to their senses," Holden "wondered" why he was the traitor, as they were now going further than he ever had. The Standard continued to call for peace and to express the view that action by the states would be necessary, as the Richmond government and that at Washington--"the two extremes"--would never give the nation peace.

¹⁶⁸Raper, p. 82. ¹⁶⁹Standard, July 20, 1864.

¹⁷⁰Ibid., August 17, 1864.

CHAPTER VI

RECONSTRUCTION

The end of the war came quickly in North Carolina. Fort Fisher, protecting Wilmington and the blockade running trade, fell to Federal forces on January 16, 1865, and the fall of Wilmington followed on February 22. With the loss of these vital points and the approach of General Sherman's army, despondency in the state became overwhelming. Efforts by Vance to rally North Carolina troops and to encourage deserters back to the lines at Richmond fell on deaf ears. The Governor refused to consider frequent suggestions that North Carolina attempt to secure peace, declaring that he would not be a party to the dishonor of the state, and that she would have to stand by the Confederacy to the end of the conflict. To President Swain of the University, however, he privately admitted that the despondency in North Carolina "shows what I have always believed: That the great popular heart is not now and never has been in this war."¹⁷¹

Holden attacked the refusal of Vance and the legislators to seek peace,¹⁷² and called for negotiations, arguing that slavery was doomed in any event and that it was useless to sacrifice another man for a dead institution.¹⁷³

¹⁷¹Quoted in: Richard E. Yates, "Governor Vance and the End of the War in North Carolina," North Carolina Historical Review, XVIII (October, 1941), 323.

¹⁷²Standard, January 11, 1865.

¹⁷³Ibid., January 18, 1865.

Fayetteville fell to Sherman on March 11, and on April 10, learning of Lee's surrender at Appamattox, General Johnston abandoned his earlier plans to try to defend Raleigh, and notified Vance that he was withdrawing to the western part of the state. Preparations were then made for the removal of the state government. The state records and vast amounts of military supplies which Vance had secured through blockade running were transferred to points further west. Leaving the mayor in charge of surrendering the city, and asking Sherman to spare the charity institutions, the museum and the capitol, Vance withdrew on April 12 to General Hoke's camp west of Raleigh. Federal forces entered the city the following day, unchallenged and almost without violence. Little damage was done to the city, with the exception of the offices of the Confederate newspapers, the Conservative and the Confederate, which were wrecked. The Progress, a union paper favorable to Holden, and the Standard were unmolested, although the former did receive a reprimand for criticism of Sherman's army.¹⁷⁴

Holden began publication on April 17, of the Daily Standard, carrying at the masthead the celebrated quotation from Daniel Webster, "Liberty and Union, Now and Forever, One and Inseparable," and urging the citizens of the state to submit to Federal authority.

And now a word to the people of North Carolina. We have been pleading for peace for the last two years, but the State and Confederate authorities insisted on fighting it out, and as it has been evidently fought out, we now appeal to the people of the State to submit to the laws and authority of the United States, and stop the worse than useless shedding of blood.

Simultaneously he began to pave the way toward reconstruction, declaring

¹⁷⁴Yates, "Governor Vance and the End of the War...", p. 328-331.

that the existing state government did not reflect the wishes of the people and had been elected by fraud, and calling for the formation of a new government.

Reporting the death of Lincoln, Holden praised Andrew Johnson as a self-made man. "We know him well.... We believe he will make a safe and able president." Looking toward what was to be Johnson's plan of reconstruction, he noted that "Our people will need, for months to come, the strong arm of military power to protect them in their pursuits and to restore order to society."¹⁷⁵ This was followed by a suggestion that a provisional governor should be appointed, to be supported by military power; that this governor then call a state convention to order the election of a new governor and legislature; that this legislature then fill the seats of the state in the national Congress; that by this method "a new State Government will be established deriving its existence immediately from a Union people."¹⁷⁶

To what extent Holden was familiar with Johnson's intentions at that time is uncertain, but it is evident that he was in communication with Johnson during the war, when the latter was military governor of Tennessee,¹⁷⁷ and it is probable that he was at least partially familiar with the plan which his editorials now foreshadowed.

On May 9, Holden received a wire from Johnson asking him to come to Washington. Together with several other prominent North Carolina unionists Holden met with the President and plans were made for establishing a provisional government in the state. It was apparent to all that Holden,

¹⁷⁵Daily Standard, April 20, 1865. ¹⁷⁶Ibid., April 24, 1865.

¹⁷⁷OR, Series I; LI, pt.2, p. 739, Series IV; II, p. 784, III, p. 807.

as the most outspoken Union man in the state, was the logical choice for provisional governor. His appointment was announced on May 29, 1865, and he assumed his duties immediately.¹⁷⁸

Holden, in his provisional governorship, was faced with serious problems. The state was bankrupt, local government was for the most part non-existent, and race-relations were worsening, particularly in the Eastern part of the state, where the presence of Negro Federal Troops was a source of discontent in the white population. One of the most difficult responsibilities facing the governor was the necessity of considering and commenting on hundreds of applications for presidential pardon, to which he had to attach a recommendation before forwarding them to President Johnson. Although he was criticized within the state for delay in approving pardons for a number of the more prominent men in the state, Holden appears to have been generous, refusing pardon absolutely in the case of only four persons, all of whom he felt to be irreconcilable rebels.¹⁷⁹

The first months of his term having been spent in organizing local governments and making necessary appointments, Holden, on August 8, 1865, issued a call for the election of delegates to the convention which was to prepare the state for readmission to the Union. The convention met on October 2, in Raleigh, and proceeded to repeal the secession ordinance, abolish slavery, repudiate the state's war debt--these three actions being required by President Johnson--and to provide for the election on November 9, 1865 of a permanent state government.¹⁸⁰ Holden was a candidate for the governorship in this election, but was defeated by Jonathan

¹⁷⁸Raper, pp. 89-90. ¹⁷⁹Ibid., p. 78.

¹⁸⁰Lefler and Newsome, p. 455.

Worth, provisional state treasurer and, like Holden, a former Union man,¹⁸¹ who took office on December 28, 1865.

Events were to provide Holden with further opportunity, however. With Radical control of Congress, and the passage of the Reconstruction Acts of 1867, abrogating the existing state government and calling for the election, by white and Negro voters, of a new constitutional convention, he again moved to the forefront in North Carolina politics. He was by this time associated with the Republican or Radical party in the state, against which were grouped, under the name of Conservative, those political elements unwilling to accept Congressional reconstruction. The new constitutional convention, elected on November 19-20, 1867, contained 107 Republican delegates and 13 Conservatives. A new constitution was written, meeting the Congressional requirements, and April, 1868, was chosen for the vote on ratification and for the election of new state officials. The constitution was ratified and Holden, running on the Republican ticket, was elected governor over Conservative Thomas S. Ashe, receiving 92,235 votes to 73,594 for Ashe.¹⁸² He was inaugurated governor on July 2, 1868, over the protest of Governor Worth, who declared that the election was not valid, and that the new government officials were "appointees of the military of the United States."¹⁸³

Holden's tenure as regular governor of North Carolina, unlike his successful provisional governorship, was marked by numerous unfortunate occurrences, which served to discredit him in the eyes of much of the population. The major issues were the carpetbagger frauds and the "Kirk-Holden War". Holden was apparently not a participant in the

¹⁸¹Raper, p. 136.

¹⁸²Ibid., pp. 150-152.

¹⁸³Holden, p. 111.

former, involving the fraudulent issue and sale of thousands of railroad bonds, but as these frauds occurred during his administration, it was felt that he should have prevented them.¹⁸⁴ The second issue, the "Kirk-Holden War", arose out of the activities of the various Ku Klux Klan-type societies in the state, and resulted in the destruction of Holden's political power in North Carolina.

These terroristic groups became active in North Carolina in 1867, and shortly after his election as governor, Holden issued a proclamation warning them that they were liable to arrest under the laws governing treason. This warning, and the passage of a law making it a felony to go about disguised, saw no results, and Klan depredations in some parts of the state worsened. Finally, in January, 1870, Holden secured passage of a law granting him the authority to use military power to restore order in areas which he judged to be in a state of insurrection.¹⁸⁵ It was charged that Holden intended to use this power to control the August elections, but this seems unlikely, as it was used in only two counties.

With the murder, in Alamance County, of a Negro Republican official, and in Caswell County, of J. W. Stephens, a state senator and Holden supported engaged in anti-Klan activities,¹⁸⁶ Holden declared these two counties in a state of insurrection, and ordered them occupied by troops newly recruited for the purpose, under the command of George W. Kirk, notorious in Western North Carolina for his Union raids during the war. These counties remained under military law until after the fall elections, and a number of citizens were arrested and detained without charges and in violation of writs of habeas corpus issued by Justice Pearson.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁴Lefler and Newsome, pp. 464-465; Raper, p. 155.

¹⁸⁵Raper, pp. 158-161. ¹⁸⁶Lefler and Newsome, p. 466.

¹⁸⁷Raper, pp. 166-170.

With the election of five Conservative Congressmen and of a Conservative majority of more than two-thirds to the General Assembly, Holden declared the insurrection ended and disbanded his troops. He had by then lost the confidence of most of the population, however, and the Conservatives were determined to remove him from office. Thus, a resolution to impeach was adopted and Holden was charged with eight offenses, including having declared states of insurrection in Alamance and Caswell counties for the purpose of subverting civil liberty and civil law, having illegally ordered the arrest and detention of several persons, among them Josiah Turner of the Raleigh Sentinel, having refused to obey writs of habeas corpus, and having unlawfully spent state funds for the reimbursement of the troops employed against the Klan. His trial, which lasted two months, was controlled by his opponents and resulted in his conviction, on March 22, 1871, on six of the eight charges. He was removed from office and permanently disqualified from holding public office in North Carolina.¹⁸⁸

Thus barred from political life in his own state, Holden considered for some time accepting either a diplomatic post or the editorship of a party newspaper in Washington, both of which were tendered him by the Republican party. He chose neither, becoming instead the political editor of the Washington National Chronicle. He remained with the Chronicle one year, and in 1873 returned to Raleigh as a Federal postmaster, a position which he held until 1881. Here ended his public career--two years later he cut his ties with the Republican party. He remained politically independent until his death in 1892. Three times at least,

¹⁸⁸Ibid., pp. 180-184. For a detailed account of Holden's trial and conviction, see Lowell T. Young, "The Impeachment and Trial of Governor William W. Holden, 1870-71" (Unpublished M. A. thesis, Department of History, University of North Carolina at Greensboro).

suggestions were made to Holden that an attempt be made to secure removal of his disabilities,¹⁸⁹ but he discouraged this, feeling that "I did not want the people to be excited and angry about it [,] which would follow debate in the two Houses.... I cannot beg for my pardon and thus admit my guilt.... In all I did I had only in view the maintenance of the law and the quiet and happiness of the people."¹⁹⁰ The disabilities were never removed.

Holden, in his later years, seems to have been strangely free of bitterness for a man to whom enmities had been common. His Memoirs reflect a mellowed and resigned attitude toward the part, and many unpleasant details, such as his treatment by his party in the 1858 campaign, go unmentioned. Of Vance, whom he had bitterly attacked, he declared, "I state unreservedly...that [he] was and is, [the] foremost man in all [North Carolina's] annals, old and new."¹⁹¹ Of his disabilities, surely the sorest point of all, he said, "I cherish no resentment toward any person for what has occurred in the past. I am at peace, or would be, with all men."¹⁹²

¹⁸⁹Raper, p. 190.

¹⁹⁰Holden, pp. 181-182.

¹⁹¹Ibid., p. 29.

¹⁹²Ibid., p. 183

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